

# Iowa Current Developments

USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service, 210 Walnut St., Rm. 693, Des Moines, IA 50309 Spring 2008

## From the Office of Acting Iowa State Conservationist Al Garner



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*Iowa Natural Resources  
Conservation Service:  
Excellence in helping people  
conserve and improve our  
natural resources,  
communities and  
environment.*

USDA is an equal opportunity  
provider and employer.

A new conservation campaign, *Conservation: Our Purpose, Our Passion* was recently launched at the National Association of Conservation Districts meeting in Reno, Nevada. This campaign is designed to tell the NRCS story through the conservation successes of landowners and field employees.

There are thousands of stories about landowners who have succeeded in reaching their conservation goals with the help of our technical assistance and that of our partners. As a member of the Iowa NRCS family, you have helped forge your own success stories working with producers and landowners. You put conservation practices in place. You work to improve the environment for all Iowans.

I have had a great opportunity since January to personally meet many of you. Your passion for conservation is obvious as I see the many conservation practices applied across the landscape. This success is a result of a great partnership-SWCDs, RC&D Councils, state agencies/organizations, etc. I have been impressed with the involvement and engagement of all partners to address pressing resource issues. Let me encourage you to make maintaining these relationships a priority, because so much more can be accomplished when working together.

I also thank you for your cooperation and support during my time in Iowa. Due to budget constraints, we have had to redirect our activities to work within available funds. We asked you to do this with less travel, less supplies and less equipment. You met our expectations every time. Thank you.

I will be here until your new State Conservationist, Rich Sims, arrives in June. There will be many conservation opportunities over the next few years. Under his leadership the future looks bright for Iowa NRCS. So stay focused on *Conservation: Our Purpose, Our Passion*.

### Sims New State Conservationist

Richard (Rich) Sims will become Iowa's 8th State Conservationist June 23, 2008. He is currently the State Conservationist in Idaho.

A native of Will County, Ill., Sims grew up on a corn, soybean and Black Angus farm. He graduated from Illinois State University in 1977 with a Bachelor of Science degree in Agronomy.

Sims began his career with USDA-NRCS in 1980 as a soil scientist in Illinois before switching career paths to soil conservationist. He held a number of positions in conservation before serving in Iowa as an assistant state conservationist for field operations from 1990 to 1996 in both Fort Dodge and West Union. In 1996 he transferred to West Virginia as Assistant State Conservationist for Operations in Morgantown, West Virginia.

### Sims Wins Award

Richard Sims, incoming Iowa NRCS State Conservationist, received the 2007 Conservation Award from the American Forest Foundation (AFF) for his work in Idaho. The AFF recognized Sims for his overall leadership and dedication in providing unprecedented levels of NRCS assistance to Idaho forestland owners.



Richard Sims

### Contractors Name Tague Conservationist of the Year

Soil Conservation Technician Melinda Tague, with NRCS in Marshalltown, is the Iowa Chapter of the Land Improvement Contractors of America (LICA) 2007 Conservationist of the Year. Tague received the award at the group's Annual Meeting and Convention January 8 in Des Moines.

LICA is a nonprofit association of contractors dedicated to the professional conservation of soil and water.

Tague was cited for coordinating 100 contractors "test driving" six new demonstration earthmoving dozers and ensuring the equipment operators followed NRCS construction plans and specifications to build a 5-acre wetland.

The construction occurred during a two-day field event at the chapter's demonstration farm in August 2007.

Marshall County District Conservationist Dana Holland said the conservation award is well-deserved. "Melinda was out there every day overseeing construction and working with the contractors," he said. "She has a very good working relationship with LICA and all the contractors in Marshall County."



Melinda Tague

### Iowa NRCS Names State Resource Conservationist

John Myers, former State Resource Conservationist in Virginia, joined the USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) in Iowa in February as the agency's new State Resource Conservationist.

Myers replaces Jim Ayen, who retired in November 2007, after more than 30 years of federal service.

In his new position, Myers will supervise and coordinate Ecological Sciences Staff as they develop and maintain conservation planning technical standards. He will also oversee the agency's technical developments involving highly erodible land and wetland compliance. The Ecological Sciences Staff includes the disciplines of agronomy, forestry, biology and water quality.

Myers' NRCS experience includes overseeing Virginia's easement and other conservation programs, such as the Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP) and Conservation Reserve Program (CRP), and serving as environmental specialist on the watershed planning team in Virginia.

Myers was born in central Iowa where his mother still resides; his brother lives in Carroll County.

Myers is married with three grown children.



John Myers

## Iowa Current Developments



The Iowa Chapter of the Soil and Water Conservation Society volunteered for Iowa Public Television's annual fundraising drive, "Festival." Volunteers worked a 5 hour shift March 1, taking 262 pledges that raised \$39,060. Participating were: First

Row: Colby Moorberg, SueAnn Lynes, Dick Tremain. Second row: Duane Miller, Stacy Schlader, Alan Lange, Mike Sucik. Third Row: Rick Knutson, Becky Ohrtman, Robert Lawson, Jason Hart, Laurel Griffin. Standing: Ryan Gerlich and Dennis Schrodt.



VFW member Glen Jones explains an Algona World War II exhibit to Tom Champa, Denis Schulte, Brenda Tenold-Moretz,

Shirley Pecoy, Pat Schaefer, Doug Adams, Lynn Kluver, Jeremy Viles and Troy Faust.

### Urban Conservationists Named by Northey

Iowa Secretary of Agriculture Bill Northey appointed five people to urban conservationist positions across Iowa. They are: Team Leader Wayne Petersen, a former Iowa NRCS urban conservationist who retired February 1; Steve Anderson, Dickinson Soil and Water Conservation District urban conservationist; Rich Maaske, state employee covering Mills and Pottawattamie counties; Jennifer Welch, urban conservationist in central Iowa; and Amy Bouska, state employee covering Johnston County.

### Area 2 Diversity Day Spent in POW Museum

In March, 30 people from Area 2 took a Diversity Day tour of Algona's World War II German Prisoner of War (POW) Camp Museum. Members of the Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) conducted the tours; two veterans from World War II addressed the group and answered questions.

Jon Matz from the Algona Field Office arraigned the activities.

During World War II, 10,000 German POWs were imprisoned in Iowa between 1943 and 1946. They worked on local farms and in factories in a four state area, providing needed wartime labor.

More information on the Algona camp is available at: <http://www.pwcamp.algona.org/>

## Iowa Current Developments



Division of Soil Conservation Secretaries from Area 5 met January 16, 2008 at the Marr Park Education Center in Ainsworth. Agenda items included human resources and retirement issues, DSC and NRCS updates, and a Federal Women's Program presentation. Attending were: Front Row: Karen Fynaardt, Des Moines; Julie Hocker, Williamsburg; Connie Cummings, Fairfield; Jamie Grimes, Burlington; Suzette Betts, Fairfield area office; Jan McClurg,

Davenport; Hope Faris, Centerville; Lori Lewis, Des Moines; Janet Williams, Wapello. Back Row: Irene Whitson, Ottumwa; Joy Koch, Iowa City; Sharon Fritchen, Sigourney; Mary Adkins, Donnellson; Diana Williams, Albia; Barb Shelman, Mt. Pleasant; Carol Brown, Malcom; Teresa Munn, Washington; Lora Schmidt, Tipton; Cindy Greene, DeWitt; Becky Hopkins, Bloomfield; Jessica Strasser, Oskaloosa; and Sharon Dunkin, Keosauqua.



Archeologist Richard Rogers (front, white coat) conducts cultural resources training for Area 4 staff in Glenwood. Participating in the late March session were: Back Row: Darin Sunderman, Dan Case, Andrew Focht, Gary Smith, Tom Klever, Steve Lewis, Jeff Sporrer. Middle: Susa-

nia Ernst, Maria Sieck, Kay Steffes, Alan Lange, Kelly Koenig, Brian Holmes, Pat Corey, Terry Gleaves, Luke Forney, Luke Zaiger. Front Row: Kathy Kahue, Joni Sell, Karla Horihan, David Gundlach, Sandy Phillips, Richard Rogers, Denise Miller, David Carter, and Shane McNaughton.

### Area 3 Review Conducted

Area 3 conducted a Quality Review the first week in March. A Quality Review is a 5-day process in which field personnel discuss concerns and issues to improve the agency and work efficiency. Seven teams examined issues and solutions on topics ranging from field residue to comprehensive nutrient management plans (CNMP).

Seven field offices hosted the Area 3 review and involved a total of 80 people from area offices and the State Office, including Acting State Conservationist Al Garner and Assistant State Conservationist (Field Operations) Al Ehley.

After the review, Ehley said, "I was gratified by the interest and desire to seek solutions between the State Office staff and field participants as issues were discussed and action items identified."



Richard Kittelson, forestry coordinator, Luke Frobish (standing), soil conservationist, Jim Ranum, grassland specialist and Bob Vobora, soil scientist, prioritize Woodland and Grass team recommendations during a quality review meeting in West Union.

### Where are They Now?

Doug Seibel, Iowa NRCS State Conservation Engineer from 1981 to 1988, is now living and working in Fort Worth as an Agricultural Engineer on the Oversight and Evaluation Team. His primary role is to assess quality, accountability and effectiveness of agency activities.

Seibel, who has 42 years of service with NRCS, occasionally gets back to Iowa. Recently he worked with Iowa NRCS' Nutrient Management Specialist Steve Brinkman on a nationwide review of comprehensive nutrient management plans (CNMP).



Doug Seibel

A 1989 heart attack forced adjustments to his lifestyle that seem to be working for him. He eats a primarily vegetarian diet and exercises daily.

Seibel still has connections with his family's farm in western Kansas, but he suspects he and his wife Jane will remain in Texas after retirement.

### Conservation Campaign

Numerous *Conservation: Our Purpose, Our Passion* campaign materials are available free of charge from the LANDCARE office in Des Moines. They including nomadic exhibits and table top displays, banner stands and printed brochures.

Contact LANDCARE at 1-888-LANDCARE or e-mail [landcare@usda.gov](mailto:landcare@usda.gov).

### Adams County Holds Conservation Conference

The Adams County Backyard Conservation Team, led by Sheila O'Riley, State Secretary in Corning, hosted 150 guests and friends at their seventh annual Backyard Conservation Conference March 29 in Lenox. It featured exhibits, break out learning sessions and keynote speakers Eileen Robb, co-host of Gardening Today on WHO Radio and Jim Pease, Ph.D., Iowa State University Extension Wildlife Specialist.

Among the Earth Team volunteer conference presenters were three NRCS staff members: John Paulin, Coordinator at the Prairie Rivers RC&D office in Ames; Jennifer Dubendorf, State Earth Team Coordinator; and Dick Tremain, Public Affairs Specialist. O'Riley said Paulin's landscaping techniques and Dubendorf's discussion on growing hostas were very popular.

Adams County District Conservationist Rick Sprague said, "Each year our annual backyard conservation conference gets bigger, thanks to hard working Earth Team volunteers and the great Adams County Field Office staff of John Klein, Cynthia Dobrovlny and Sheila O'Riley. We've found promoting backyard conservation in our towns is a wonderful way of reinforcing our conservation message to rural landowners. As a team, we like to put conservation practices wherever they are needed."

### Johnson Takes California Detail

Public Affairs Specialist Jason Johnson spent March on a detail to Southern California, conducting communication and information work out of the Riverside Area Office, in the aftermath of last fall's wildfires that ravaged the area.

San Diego County, the southernmost county in California, received more than \$4 million in EQIP funds for affected producers to install erosion control practices, replace and improve slow-drip irrigation systems and provide access roads.



Jason Johnson

Since 2003 several counties in Southern California have endured devastating wildfires. The Emergency Watershed Protection program (EWP) has assisted those counties in brush removal and other fuel management practices to alleviate the risk of future fires.

Johnson says he is happy he took the opportunity to work in California. "There is so much diversity in both agriculture and people, and I found that very interesting and gratifying to write about," he said. "California farmers have their own distinct challenges and issues, but they try to be good stewards of the land, just like Iowa farmers."

## Iowa Current Developments



Iowa State Patrol Trooper Brian Shelley simulates a field sobriety test on Area 4 personnel Weston Dittmer, Logan Marie Sieck, Oakland; and Tom Hurford, Atlantic. Shelley gave the demonstration to 140 Area 4 employees as

part of an area wide defensive driver training course. The training complies with an Iowa NRCS requirement that all people who drive vehicles must complete defensive driver training by June 1, 2008.

### Employees Get Hands-On Soils Training

In March, 29 participants from around the state attended one of three hands-on training sessions on the field identification of soils according to the Unified Soil Classification System (USCS). The method consists of a set of "visual-manual" tests such as the ribbon, shine, and toughness tests performed on different classes of coarse and fine-grained soils.

The training sessions, taught by NRCS Geologists Kathy Woida and Angela Bowman, were held in Marengo, Hampton and Atlantic.

The training included self-study modules, lab training and passing an open-book exam.



Norm Stone, Soil Conservation Technician, Wapello, and Nick Schaefer, Civil Engineer, Williamsburg, work on a soil identification exercise during a March soil mechanics laboratory session in Marengo.

### Tool Kit Training Conducted Statewide

Over 400 Iowa NRCS staff members and partners took ToolKit computer software training from November 2007 to February 2008 in 28 locations across the state.

ToolKit is a software program that can plan and record conservation practices on the land. "It is used as a national NRCS business tool for reporting conservation practices planned and applied across the country," said Paul Sweeney, Assistant State Conservationist (Operations).

"In order to be accurate in our work, it is very important every field conservationist use this software in a consistent and efficient manner. That's why this statewide training was conducted."



State Resource Conservationist John Myers and District Conservationists Dale DuVal and Russ Kurth react to ToolKit software training conducted by GIS Specialist Jennifer Dubendorf.

## Personnel Actions

Name	Title	Grade	Eff Date	Action	Duty Station
Ahrndt, Laurie	Soil Conserv Techncn	7	1/6/08	Reassignment	New Hampton
Erdmann, Anastasia	Soil Conservst	9	1/6/08	Reassignment	Bloomfield
Fitzgerald, William	Soil Conserv Techncn	6	1/6/08	Conv to Career Intern	Estherville
Gatlin, Cynthia	Soil Conserv Techncn	6	1/6/08	Conv to Career-Cond	Malcom
Groth, Jacob	Soil Conserv Techncn	6	1/6/08	Reassignment	New Hampton
Hathcock, Ronda	Civil Engr	9	1/6/08	Reassignment	Ankeny
Mitchell, Julie	Soil Conserv Techncn	6	1/6/08	Reassignment	Waverly
Schaefer, Nicholas	Civil Engr	9	1/6/08	Promotion	Williamsburg
Schwalbe, Lori	Soil Conserv Techncn	5	1/6/08	Conv to Career Appt	Bloomfield
Fedler, Gary	Soil Conserv Techncn	6	1/20/08	Conv to Career-Cond	Donnellson
Mensing, Tim	Agri Engr	9	1/20/08	Reassignment	Atlantic
Sperry, Wyatt	Soil Conservst	7	1/20/08	Conv to Career-Cond	Centerville
Petersen, Wayne	Soil Conservst	12	2/2/08	Retirement	Iowa City
Hammerly, John	Soil Scientist	7	2/3/08	Career Intern Appt	Storm Lake
Straka, Alexis	Agri Engr	9	2/3/08	Conv to Career-Cond	Sioux City
Kraus, Gina	Agri Engr	9	2/15/08	Resignation	Ottumwa
Myers, John	Soil Conservst	13	2/17/08	Reassignment	Des Moines
Schwalbe, Lori	Soil Conserv Techncn	6	2/17/08	Promotion	Bloomfield
Wegner, Jesse	Soil Conservst		2/17/08	Reassigned to FSA	Corydon FO
Dustin, James	Civil Engrg Techncn	9	2/29/08	Retirement	Des Moines
Paulin, John	RC&D Coordinator	11	3/2/08	Reassignment	Ames
Schnoor, Lori	Soil Conservst	12	3/2/08	Name Chg from Harris	Maquoketa
Taliga, Christine	RC&D Coordinator	12	3/2/08	Chg in Duty Station	Amana
Cooper, James	Res Conservst	12	3/3/08	Reassignment	Ankeny
Pruitt, Kelvin	Soil Conservst	7	3/11/08	Resignation	Carroll
Wichman, Bonnie	Office Assistant	7	3/16/08	Promotion	Sioux City

### Partner Personnel Changes

#### Retired:

Judy Weinkoetz, Secretary from Clarke SWCD, November 2007

Rocky Thein, Soil Conserv Techncn from Clayton SWCD, December 2007

#### New Employees:

Dan Bratrud, Environmental Specialist in Mitchell SWCD, November 2, 2007

Daryl Boulware, Soil Conserv Techncn in Des Moines SWCD, December 14, 2007

Steve Kiley, Soil Conserv Techncn in Clayton SWCD, January 11, 2008

Karen Androy, Secretary in Harrison SWCD, February 8, 2008

Derek Doyle, Soil Conserv Techncn in Adams SWCD, February 11, 2008

#### Left IDALS/DSC:

Cindy McEnany-O'Connell, Secretary from Muscatine, November 2007

Aaron Pickens, Iowa SWCD to DNR, December 2007

Clair Acker, State Technician in Oakland, retired February 21, 2008

#### From Area 4

Matt Allen, SWCD Wildlife Specialist, hired in the Council Bluffs and Logan Field Offices

Jamie Lowrey, State Secretary, Osceola, hired effective March 24, 2008

Ben Gleason, Environmental Specialist, hired Whitebreast Project in Osceola and Chariton.